

## **SOCIALIZATION PROCESS**

There comes a time in your life when you dead end on the search for your identity as something unique. At that point, you start looking around for what connects you to other people, not what distinguishes you alone.

Phyllis Rose

### **OBJECTIVES:**

1. Explain the socialization process and its influence on your perceptions of others.
2. Identify the sources of influence on your socialization.
3. List some examples of attitudes and behavior learned during socialization.
4. Identify how these attitudes and behaviors can affect your relationships with others in the Cadet Wing.
5. Describe personal strategies for increasing your personal awareness and changing behaviors.

As a fourth class cadet, you are now immersed in an environment that may seem very similar or very different from your childhood environment. You are among people from different culture, backgrounds, countries (some international), sex, religion, etc.. There will be times when you will find yourself judging people because their values, opinions, and behaviors are different from yours. As a cadet and a future officer, it is critical you learn how to value and fully utilize the differences among Air Force members to accomplish the mission.

### **WHAT IS SOCIALIZATION PROCESS?**

Most people refer to the socialization process in terms of “programming” because it encompasses values, beliefs, opinions, attitudes, expected roles, cultural norms, goals, etc. we learned from birth to the present. Additionally, most of our values, perceptions, stereotypes, and behaviors are constantly being developed, challenged, refined, and/or reinforced through our day to day experiences.

**The meaning of an event always resides in the individual, not the event itself. Human beings are meaning creators. Ten people can have the same experience, but it can have significantly different meaning for each of them.”**

Harold Clive Wells

The quote from Harold Clive Wells summarizes that the ways we were brought up (socialized) in the world affect the way we perceive and judge others. For example, once a year, the Air Force Academy hosts an International Week. Let's say that during the week, international officers and visitors were encouraged to practice their own customs and traditions. You are seated at Mitchell Hall with an international officer and were ready to eat lunch when you noticed the international officer was eating with her right hand. (Note: In your Military and Social Decorum, eating with fingers/hand are not encouraged.) What will you think about this officer? Is she uncivilized? Are you offended? Is she being disrespectful? Your answer will mostly likely be based on your socialization and what you perceive as right, wrong, or different.

### **SOURCES THAT INFLUENCE THE SOCIALIZATION PROCESS**

**A. Family.** The most influential agent of socialization is the family. Parents influence socialization by controlling or providing access to other potential sources of influence. Family influences include parents, grandparents, siblings, and other family members who are our role models when we were growing up. Family influences also include such simple concepts as etiquette, to much more complex ideas such as religion.

**B. Media.** Media, which includes television, radio, newspapers, books, advertisement, and such, also influence socialization. Some of you probably know of someone whose role model was a baseball, football, actor/actress, basketball, race car driver, etc.figure. Media has a powerful influence throughout the childhood and adolescent years. It is considered the largest source of influence outside the family.

**C. Peers and Friends.** One's peer group is a significant source of influence for social development. Peer influence is very strong in today's society. Today, children and teenagers are doing things (good and bad) because their friends are "doing the same thing."

**D. Teachers and School.** Because of the large amounts of time and interaction encountered during the elementary and high school years, the educational system has a large influence on the individual's socialization and development. You probably still remember your favorite coach, teacher, counselor and his or her impact on you as an individual.

**E. Day Care.** With the recent changes in the basic family unit, and more single and dual parents working outside the family, day care has become a larger influence in the socialization process because of the time many children spend in a day care environment.

Now that you know the most common sources of our socialization process, let us look at examples of attitudes and behaviors some of you may have "picked" up along the way.

## **EXAMPLES OF ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR FROM OUR SOCIALIZATION PROCESS**

\* In some cultures, a comfortable distance for conversation is closer than people in the United States find comfortable. For an example, an international student who is conversing with you may sit or stand inside your “personal” space. You may think the individual is disrespectful or being forward or “fresh” with you.

\* Generally, in the American culture the rules of eye contact (direct eye contact) are learned very early and are usually followed unconsciously. The danger is that other Americans (of different “programming”) were socialized differently in terms of eye contact. Some cultures consider direct eye contact as disrespectful or challenging authority.

\* Perhaps some of us were programmed to “get to the point” when discussing issues, especially in counseling. In some culture, it is important to establish relationship first before addressing the issue. Consequently, some people spend two or three hours of becoming acquainted before “getting to the point.”

\* Most of us were programmed to think that there are masculine and feminine roles and jobs. Some of us were encouraged to pursue a career, while others are encouraged to consider other alternatives. This attitude also includes feelings and opinions about people outside our own group.

If you look back and just remember what messages you were being given, you will find that you are the result of your programming. Is that good or bad? Neither. It just made you who you are. The most important point is not to judge people’s programming as good or bad, but accept for what they are, different. However, when your socialization starts affecting other cadets, you need to examine the effect it can have on your relationships with others in the Cadet Wing.

## **IMPACT OF ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIORS ON YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS IN THE CADET WING**

When you believe you are better than others, you can find yourself judging others, their point of views, and their behaviors according to your standards rather than the Cadet Wing or Air Force standards.

The belief you are better can also hinder open communication and trust between you and others. Your peers may perceive you as not valuing their inputs and stop giving them to you. Consequently, you do not get a chance to look at a situation with a different perspective, and your approach to the situation may not be the best solution.

Being able to follow and lead requires immense capacity to suspend judgment, value and appreciate differences, and assess the situation accurately. Believing your values, beliefs, norms, and culture are better can get in the way of your decision making process.

**“We cannot safely assume that other people’s minds work on the same principles as our own. All too often, others with whom we come in contact do not reason as we reason, or do not value the things we value, or are not interested in what interest us.”**

**Isabel Briggs Myers**

So, what can you do to ensure that your “programming” help you instead of hurt your followership and leaderships ability? Here are some things you can do.

**A. Awareness.** It is the key to change. Here are several strategies to increase awareness.

**\* Reflection/Introspection.** Sometimes it is helpful to reflect on why we do the things we do. It’s beneficial at times to discover the origins of our beliefs and values. Additionally, do an honest assessment of yourself. Become familiar with your behavior that are defensive or close-minded. Ask and be open to feedback and use it to help put things into perspective.

**\* Accept New Information** about others and self to include culture, religion, etc. Become involved in new situations. Get to know people who are different from you.

**B. Set Goals for Change.**

**\* Be Realistic.** If you find that there are things about you that you would like to change, set realistic goals. If you see some of your goals accomplished you will be motivated to accomplish more in terms of change. If you think your goals are hard to reach, reassess and set new ones.

**\* Self Motivation.** If you are motivated or persuaded to change your behavior, you are more likely to eventually change your attitude. Get a friend or another peer to give you some feedback. Sometimes, we do not notice small things we do, but others do.

**C. Accept the Differences.**

**\* Different** does not mean right or wrong, good or bad, it is just different. Accept it for what it is. You are not asked to believe other cultures, but are asked to respect their culture and vice-versa.

\* If you are not sure on how to deal with differences or act in different situations, the best approach is to plan ahead of time. Know what function you are attending and ask someone to explain what are the “norms” of the function/gathering. Additionally, you can consider getting to the gathering early and observe other attendees’ behavior.

**You cannot hope to build a better world without improving the individuals. To that end each of us must work for his own improvement, and at the same time share a general responsibility for all humanity, our particular duty being to aid those to whom we think we can be most useful.**

**Marie Curie**

### **CONCLUSION:**

Our socialization process played a big role in shaping the person you are today. However, your capacity to learn and appreciate people, situations, and other things are limitless and within your control. Take the challenge today and get to know the people around you and give them the opportunity to know you.

### **REVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Describe the socialization process.

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2. Name and explain the two sources of socialization.

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3. Describe the three strategies for increasing your personal awareness.

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